

The Question: Who

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DALLAS (AP) — In death as in life, John Connally could not escape the echoes of gunfire 30 years ago in Dealey Plaza.

As the former Texas governor lay in state in Austin this summer, researchers were demanding bullet fragments from his body. They insisted tests would prove President John F. Kennedy's slaying was the result of a conspiracy.

The attempt failed. The fragments from the horror of November 1963 were buried with Connally. But the theories were not.

Indeed, they have never been more pronounced than today, as a generation of Americans born after the assassination reaches adulthood.

It is almost as if the trauma of Kennedy's death and the memory of his Camelot cannot compete with the clamor about conspiracy.

The question these three decades later, it seems, is not "Who was JFK?"

It is "Who killed JFK?"

The sky was overcast that Friday morning, but the autumn sun melted away the chill and the cloud cover as Air Force One made the short hop from Fort Worth to Dallas Love Field.

It was Nov. 22, 1963.

At the urging of local politicians, Kennedy ordered the reflective glass shield atop the Presidential limousine removed.

Huge, enthusiastic crowds greeted the motorcade. Kennedy, his wife Jackie at his side, smiled and waved from the back seat. Up front, John and Nellie Connally beamed at the Texas welcome.

Just before 12:30 p.m., the motorcade slipped out of the glass and steel canyons of downtown and zigzagged toward Elm Street and a drab, seven-story brick building.

The first shot sounded like a

firecracker. The second and third shots were unmistakably gunfire.

In 1964, the Warren Commission concluded that three shots were fired on the motorcade, all from the depository building's sixth floor and all by Lee Harvey Oswald.

Soon, however, the first wave of conspiracy buffs were arguing over how many shots were fired, from where and by whom. The grassy knoll next to the book warehouse would become, as one writer called it, "an elevation on the American landscape as prominent as Mount Rushmore."

Significantly, no one reported seeing a second gunman that day, and virtually everyone reported hearing no more than three shots.

Even so, the Warren Report came under attack almost immediately, and a zealous district attorney in New Orleans launched an investigation that eventually resulted in the only criminal trial connected to the bloodshed in Dallas.

Jim Garrison prosecuted businessman Clay Shaw on conspiracy charges in a trial that included 34 days of testimony and less than an hour of jury deliberations. After the acquittal, Garrison arrested Shaw for perjury, but the courts dismissed the

case, branding it outrageous and inexcusable persecution.

Thirty years later, surveys show that more than eight out of 10 Americans do not accept the basic conclusion that Oswald, a lifetime misfit, was the lone assassin.

Yet, as so many reject the commission's finding, the Kennedy family itself accepts it.

At the heart of most conspiracy arguments is whether the same bullet — the so-called Magic Bullet — could have passed through Kennedy's upper back and caused the wounds suffered by Connally.

The two were struck almost at the same instant. If the same bullet could not have wounded both men, there had to have been a second bullet — and therefore a second gunman.

A new book by lawyer-journalist Gerald Posner offers a case for the single-bullet theory that adheres to the government's basic conclusion.

Posner explains how medical expertise combined with computerized re-enactments, special enhancements of the Zapruder film and new bullet-impact tests prove the single-bullet theory. Accordingly, Oswald's first shot

Killed JFK?

missed, the second hit both Kennedy and Connally and the third indisputably was the fatal Kennedy head shot.

But so many, still, refuse to believe. Partly, it is because Kennedy's death was such a consuming event; partly, it is because in subsequent years — during Vietnam, throughout the Watergate scandal, at so many other junctures — the government lied.

Implausible Case Builds Skepticism

WASHINGTON (AP) — The mob did it. Fidel Castro did it. The KGB did it. The right wing did it. The left wing did it. The government did it.

Thirty years after the murder of John F. Kennedy, most Americans think that someone other than Lee Harvey Oswald killed Kennedy. Or they think Oswald had helpers, never apprehended, in a plot that's never been investigated.

They reject the Warren Commission's conclusion that Oswald was a warped loner who acted alone, without the knowledge of anyone else.

If the Kennedy family itself accepts the commission's conclusion, why is it so widely doubted? Even Bill Clinton and Al Gore told reporters last year that they doubted the official version.

One reason for the skepticism is obvious: the case is so implausible.

Consider:

A 19-year-old former Marine defects to the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War and marries a Russian woman. Three years after his defection, Soviet authorities allow him to return to this country. He drifts to Dallas and on the day that the President is to visit, he is able to sneak a rifle into his work place, overlooking the route of the Presidential motorcade.

He fires three shots in short order. A single bullet kills the President and wounds Texas Gov. John Connally. Then, despite the intense security that accompanies any President, he gets away from the murder scene on foot.

But he is arrested and jailed. Two days later, while being transferred from one jail to another, a nightclub owner with ties to the mob manages to get into the jail with a gun and to kill Oswald.

It seemed preposterous 30 years ago; it seems preposterous still. Small wonder that to millions of people it remains beyond be-

lief.

And that's not all. The official commission created to investigate the murder made mistakes of its own, starting with the way it conducted the investigation.

Instead of hiring independent investigators, the Warren Commission depended on the work of the CIA and the FBI, the very agencies that some saw as part of the conspiracy.

And when the House Select Committee on Assassinations restudied the Kennedy case in 1979, it concluded that the slaying "probably" was the result of a plot. But having decided that, it disbanded. No government body followed up.

The writer of a recent best-seller that finds fault with the Warren Commission's work but endorses its fundamental conclusion points to an additional factor to account for the skepticism.

Oswald never was put on trial. Because of that, said Gerald Posner, author of "Case Closed," the American adversarial system of justice — in which two sides lay their cases before a neutral judge or jury — was denied the opportunity to work.

Compare Oswald's fate to that of James Earl Ray, who was tried in the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. and found guilty. Ray subsequently wrote a book asserting that he was part of a conspiracy.

"But we don't pay him much heed because Ray had his day in court," Posner said.

"Oswald never had that day. If he were sitting in jail today and saying there was a conspiracy, some people might listen to him, but it would not be the same," Posner said.

Distrust of the government runs strong and feeds the skepticism, said Tulane University psychologist Fred Koenig.

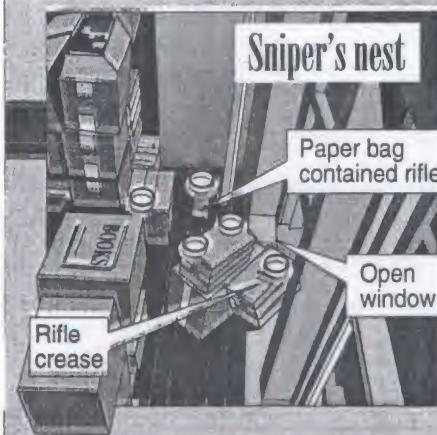
The sense that a massive conspiracy and coverup existed was reinforced for the millions who saw the 1991 Oliver Stone movie, "JFK."



November 22, 1963

The horrifying scene that unfolded in Dealey plaza at 12:30 p.m. was intensified by the presence of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. Her cry of "Oh my God, they have shot my husband!" reported minutes after the shooting, was the first indication to the outside world that Kennedy had been hit. And her ashen appearance in Washington beside her husband's casket, with her dress smeared with blood, shocked the nation.

THREE SHOTS



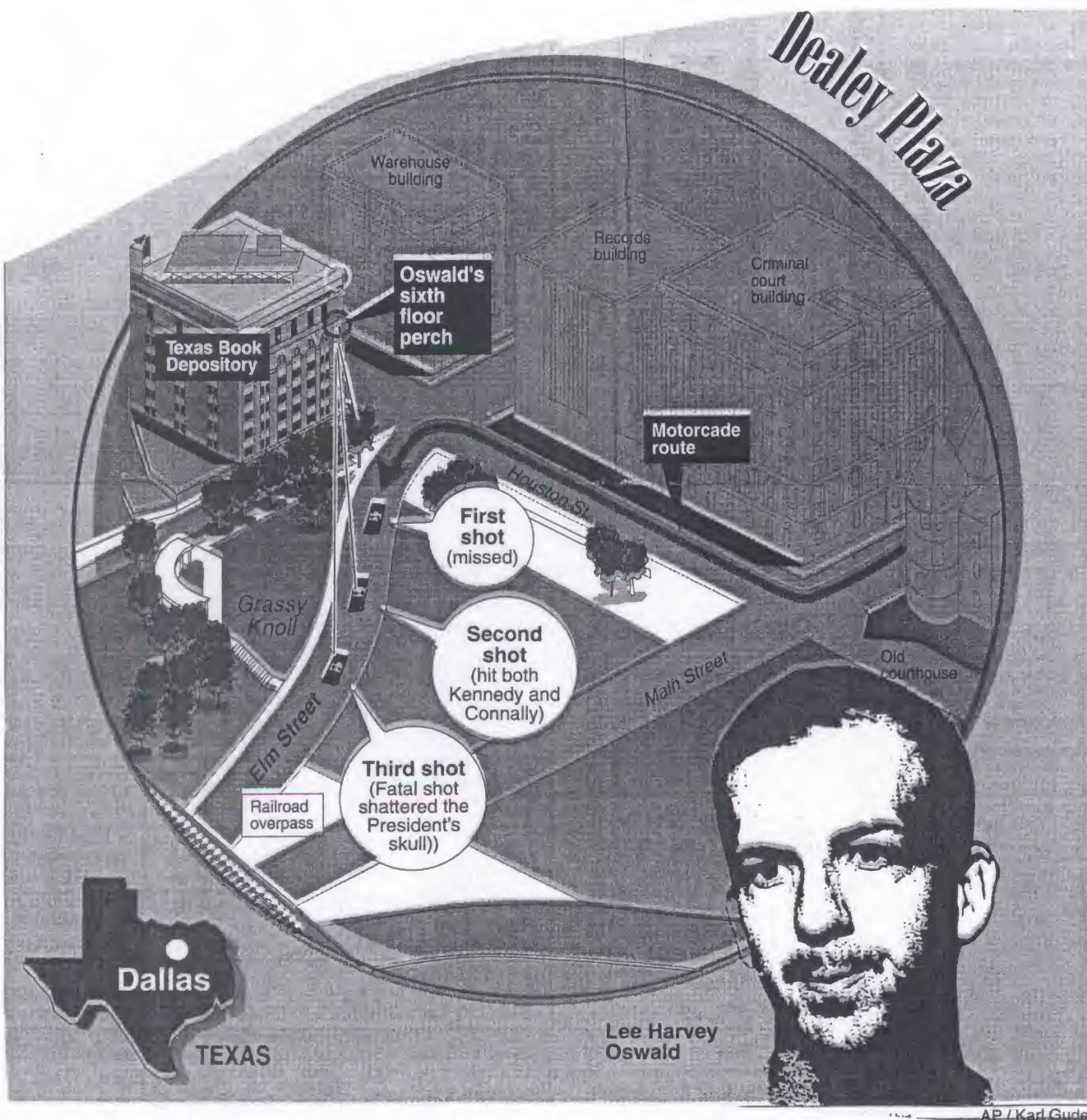
Palm and fingerprints and a rifle crease were discovered on cardboard book boxes at the open window.

No clear audio tape of the assassination exists. But many witnesses, including reporters, police, and secret service agents, testified to three shots. A Dallas radio reporter had a tape, later erased, indicating three shots.



Two Secret Service agents were in the front seat. In the left jump seat, Nellie Connally; in the right was Texas Gov. John B. Connally; left-rear, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy; The President, right rear. Bullet damage to the inside-front windshield helped support arguments that Kennedy was shot from behind. Lack of bullet damage elsewhere in interior supported single bullet theory.

The Warren Commission said two hit: the first passed through JFK's neck and Gov. Connally's chest and wrist, lodging in his thigh; the second struck Kennedy, fatally, in the head.



AP / Karl Gude